

# THE SURVEY

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## Country Schools—New Style

By LORINE PRUETTE

Woodcuts by J. J. Lankes

**T**HE famous little red schoolhouse is gone, or going. Going, too, are the little white schoolhouses, flimsily built of wood, that stood on the edge of the village close beside the church. The big red schoolhouse has come in their stead, the consolidated school that often rises like a startling excrescence upon an empty plain, with no habitation in sight, with no sign of life anywhere save in the line of auto-buses, waiting to take the children home.

Only the sentimentalist can regret the passing of the one-room schoolhouse. The consolidated school with its superior equipment, its better paid teachers, and its possibilities of serving as the cultural and community center for great rural areas offers the possibility of education for the country child on approximate equality with that of the city child. How far such schools have yet to go is indicated in the studies which the Southern Woman's Educational Alliance has been conducting for the last five years. Under the direction of O. Latham Hatcher the Alliance has been gathering immensely valuable material about the rural child, primarily about the rural girl. The Alliance counselors have gone into the country districts and into the mountains, striving to learn the particular handicaps of the rural girl and to devise a guidance program which will lessen these handicaps. It is Miss Hatcher's conclusion that the school has the key to the situation but that many factors combine to interfere with the school's efficiency. Among these are mentioned, in one of the studies to be published in the fall, the fact that the rural teachers are even yet much less well trained than city teachers, that there is often a high turnover among such teachers, that the school facilities are poor and the school libraries meager.

There is still another factor mentioned—the bus. The bus, theoretically at least, runs on schedule, and the children who come long distances are often cut off from participation in out-of-school activities. With the bus waiting there is no chance to linger and get acquainted, while the children who live nearby form a privileged aristocracy that discriminates against the bus children.

When I was a country girl in the South and walked to the little white schoolhouse at the edge of the village, the children used to come tramping out to play under the big trees after school or to sprawl around on the ground while "teacher"—that glamorous, all-knowing creature—told us stories. And then there was the short walk home, swinging our lunch baskets, special friends clustering close together, parting reluctantly at this door and that, shrilling passionate farewells through the twilight, making unnecessary promises for the morrow's walk to school. We had so many absorbing games. It is still hard for me to realize that country children, at any rate the younger ones, suffer from a lack of recreation. With the older children, it is, of course, easy to see the absence of suitable facilities for recreation. And it is clear that the waiting, impatient bus has changed the whole nature of the school day and that organized recreation would seem to be indicated as a next step for the school to take.

**T**HERE are twelve million rural children in the country, the largest proportion being found in the South. Hence the Alliance studies of southern districts aim at the heart of the problem, whether or not conditions in the South are entirely representative of other sections. Not only do we learn that most of these southern rural girls have few recreational facilities, we learn as well that in a great many cases they have little leisure. Here is a highschool girl who rises at six in the morning, prepares breakfast, makes the younger children ready for school, and walks a mile and a half, crossing two creeks and hurrying to catch the bus which will take her twelve miles and a half to school. Often it is dark when she comes back from school to continue the round of domestic duties. When can this child play? Is it strange that many of the children when asked what they do when they can do what they want to, reply simply, "sleep," or "rest"?

G. Stanley Hall wrote an enthusiastic account of the training secured by a village boy and he was fond of emphasizing the value to the child of growing up on a farm, sharing in the chores, growing acquainted with life at its source. John H. Finley in a recent talk grew lyrical in much the

same fashion, recalling his own childhood in the country. But Miss Hatcher has been seeing country children of today. Drudgery is the word she uses to describe much of rural child life. In the light of their home and farm duties it is surprising that they find time even for the home study they report—one to two hours a day in preparation for the morrow's lessons.

Drudgery is a harsh word, but exploitation is worse. Here is a girl, third from the youngest of nine children, who was stopped in the tenth grade to be a little slavey for the family. The sons are pronounced worthless by the villagers and they and their families hang about the family kitchen. The only labor-saving device is an inside pump. The father is a mechanic, the mother immersed in the family and in her own invalidism, while this only daughter sinks further and further into the position of family drudge. The girl showed some ability at teaching when she substituted in the village school. The sentiment of the community is that the family could afford to give the only daughter the education she desires. When questioned as to occupations open to women she seemed to know only two, nursing and teaching. It seems improbable that the family would consent to her preparing for either. A counselor on the ground might be able to save this girl and secure her the preparation she needs for life, but much of the year her village is entirely inaccessible because of bad roads, and it is always isolated. Unless something is done very soon, "a girl recognized in her own community as having unusual possibilities and one capable of being very useful there or elsewhere in the country, will become a confirmed household drudge."

Nearly all of the girls selected for study by the Alliance liked to go to school. For most of them school is the center of their social experiences and provides whatever recreational activities they are to have. Many of them like to study. They like oral reading, English literature, spelling and music. Latin is the subject most generally disliked. A number of girls give indication of special abilities for which the schools cannot train them. One girl, living in an isolated village, has always tried to draw, although she never had training. To her great joy she won a prize in drawing at the county fair and the Alliance showed her how to gain admission to a brief summer course in art. The instructor in this course reported that the girl showed talent which should justify her looking forward to earning her living in commercial art. The problem is now to persuade the family to give her further opportunity. Since it is so difficult to get to the village the program must be developed, not too satisfactorily, by letters to this quarry-worker and his wife.

The group studied includes the schoolgirls of highest academic standing at their age level in the county. The range in intelligence quotients is from 69 to 130, median 88. In mental ages the girls range from 11

to 18 years, in chronological ages from 12 to 19. On the average they were found retarded more than a year, both in intelligence and in educational achievement, as compared with city children. Divided into two groups, they showed a low correlation between grades and I. Q. for the superior group (.14), and a negative correlation for the other group (—10). The eighth-grade students were found to be superior to the ninth. The report suggests some evidence that the schools are learning to make the most of the limited mental endowment of the children, but it raises at the same time the vexing question whether rural I. Q.'s may be justly compared with the established norms. How much is the retardation inevitable and how much is it due to poor teaching, poor school equipment, a dearth of reading matter, low economic status and limited economic background of the parents? Are the country children behind the city ones because the "best blood" has been drawn off to the cities, or are they behind just because they live in the country?

WHILE the scientists are working on a determination of this problem, the practical aspects of the testing dilemma are now affecting these girls. Nearly half of the selected group want to go to college and about a sixth to teachers' colleges. Some of that number will drop out because their families cannot—or will not—send them, because they do not know how to secure scholarships and extra work to take them through on their own initiative, and because they know so little about college possibilities. But a surprising proportion will press on after all these decimating influences have operated. Will any of them be able to get into our best colleges? They will be twice handicapped, by the customary consideration of the standing of the highschool from which they come and in many schools by the intelligence examinations. Some of the parents recognize this situation and plan to send the girl to a city highschool for a fifth year of preparation before endeavoring to enter college.

While the rural school children have always been handicapped, the situation now is more unjust. Formerly a great many of us went to these inadequate schools. Dr. Hall and Dr. Finley learned their letters in little country schools, as did so many other men and women of later solid achievements. Few of our great men have been born in cities. Hardships may have been involved in country origins, but at least the hardships were common to great numbers. But

now, in spite of the very great improvements in the status of rural education, the discrimination is more bitter. Urbanization and the adoption of urban standards make life more difficult for those who are left outside the favored circle. If all the colleges of the country become as exacting as some of our leading colleges in the matter of entrance requirements, the country child will almost automatically be excluded from higher edu-



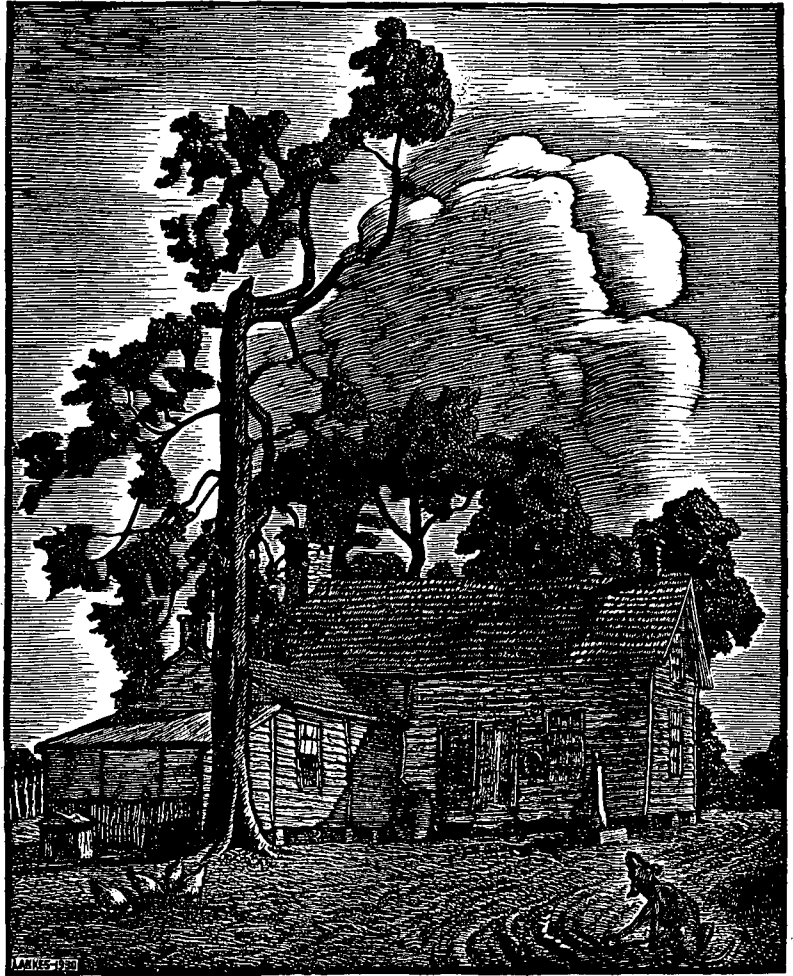
THE COUNTRY STORE

cation. To be sure, conditions are steadily improving in the country districts but not fast enough to lift the handicap from the present millions of farm children. The Alliance aims to level some of the inequalities by the development of a guidance program for rural children and by working with the schools in the utilization of the peculiar advantages of the rural environment. John W. Herring, following his work with the American Association for Adult Education which took him into a variety of communities north and south, has reported that almost invariably it is the school principal who stands out in the small community as the man most capable of grasping the significance of new ideas. The Alliance makes a similar approach and feels that it is from the school that the community must gain its conception of a wider cultural life.

Some of the problems of the rural school cannot be referred to delinquency on the part of anyone involved. Here is a youngster with an I. Q. of 130, in a school in which the other children range from 69 to 97. She has no one of her ability to play with or to work with. Apparently her development has been a wholesome and a splendid one, but there can be little question that this wide difference between her and her associates will color the rest of her life. She reads everything she can get hold of, all the 300 books added to the school library within the year, all that the neighbors have. Her school has an unusually good library of 13,000 volumes. Lacking companions, this child early turned to writing little books of stories illustrated by the author. She wants to go four years to college and her parents hope to be able to manage two.

The country breeds all manner of girls. Here is another girl, one who makes friends everywhere, who shows the traits of a natural leader, very fair and tolerant and easily setting the tone of whatever group she is in. In her little town the wives of the older residents strive to keep their daughters away from this child of a crude but wholesome home, but the girl's personality draws friends about her. She reads little and needs cultural contacts, talks of going to college but is restless at the idea of submitting to discipline for four more years. She thinks she wants to teach but cannot bring herself to plan anything definite. She is extremely competent in everything she does, and sometimes earns a little money by cleaning in the houses of the neighbors. Living absorbs her from day to day; without some outside influences toward more adequate preparation she will probably drift along as her mother has done, although the Alliance feels that she has within her, perhaps, the "capacity to become the most influential woman in her community."

**M**OST of the girls indicated a genuine love for the country. They should naturally develop into the rural leaders of the next generation, but after leaving school they face two courses, each with undesirable possibilities. When some of the girls were asked what they were going to do after school is over they answered, "Oh, just go on stayin' home." This means probably the early end of their cultural life, tedious work at home, loneliness that makes them eager for early marriage. Then a new home is set up, little if any advanced beyond the home they have left, and the vicious circle repeats

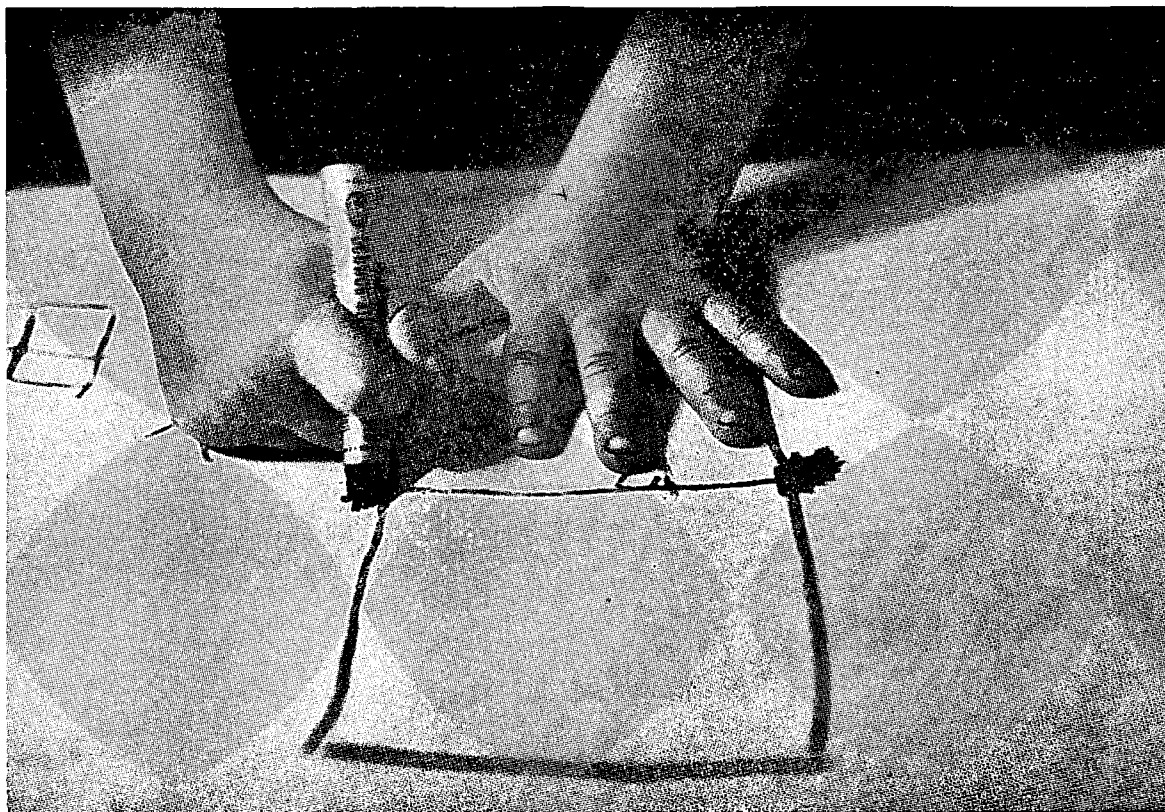


VIRGINIA FARMYARD

itself: a large family, poverty, a bare life and no better expectation for the children. On the other hand, the more restless and rebellious girls long for the lights of the city, the movies, the crowds, the opportunities to meet boys, and are swept in a bright, laughing tide into the city streets where one fortune or another, some of them far from good, may befall them. The much smaller group of country girls who come to the city equipped to get jobs, knowing how to take care of themselves, or who come with the money for special training, are the very girls who could make rural America such a different place to live in. But after they have had city training and city jobs there often seems very little for them to go back to in the country. Some of them, sick for the open country and the solace of growing things, pass all their lives in a brick and asphalt city where they never feel quite at home.

Then there are the girls who are held in the country because they have not the strength to fight their way out, and there is no one to help them secure the training which they need for a fuller life wherever they may reside. A lovely, delicate girl sits in a tumbledown cottage between her tattered father and her shapeless mother, looking like some exotic alien. She wants to be a school-teacher and is ambitious in a timid way. The family want her to have better preparation before she enters teaching, but they face difficulties in keeping her in highschool. Her home is so isolated that she has to "board out" during the winter months in order to get to the school, and these few dollars for room and meals are a heavy expense (Continued on page 245)





LITTLE HANDS

Photo by Erhard Dörner in *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*

# Five Little Experiments

By ADELAIDE NICHOLS

**M**ARY'S children are strung out through the Boulder Brook School like a string of beads in graded sizes. There are five of them, beginning with Tim in the nursery school and ending with Eleanor in the eighth grade. It seemed to me that Mary should know what the "new" schools can do for your children. She has evinced her faith in Boulder Brook not only by producing five of its pupils, but by serving on the Parents' Committee for the Choice of Teachers and by furnishing the Board of Trustees with a chairman in the person of her husband. Boulder Brook, in accord with progressive-school principles, is run by parent committees and parent trustees, not because they are educational experts or financiers, but simply because they are parents and so should know what children need. I had every reason to hope that Mary's children are getting what they need.

"Some of them are," was the best she could say for it. "Welles is the kind of child that needs a progressive school. I think the old kind of formal, competitive classes run by bells and drills would have made him into a sullen little donkey. At home he's always been slower than the others, a little clumsy in games, and easily discouraged by being outclassed. Even Mary Second, who is only five, a year and a half younger than Welles, can do things that he can't. He was shy of meeting new children and reluctant to enter games, always fearing, I suppose, to make a poor showing.

"But from his kindergarten year, the teachers took tremendous pains with him. They didn't jostle him into a pace that would have confused him. They found that he was good at doing things with his hands, and they built up his self-confidence by giving him a chance to excel at crafts. Bit by bit he took part in class projects. He comes to me sometimes rather red in the face and says, 'There's going to be a play, Mother—all about Vikings.' Off I go and find Welles speaking up manfully in his part, with chin high and eyes shining.

"Welles is the kind that loves concrete things, of course, and all this illustrative work means a great deal to him. He's been a Viking all this fall, helping to build ships and mede halls, painting banners and shields. The new school speaks his language.

"Babs, on the other hand, would probably have done better in a regular formal school. She's lazy, happy-go-lucky: everyone adores her. She gets along quite to her own satisfaction with very little work. I believe she needs more spurring and driving than she gets at Boulder Brook. They leave her to take her own pace and she lies right down and accomplishes nothing. No one seems to worry very much, least of all Babs. She is vastly amused by what all the eager, energetic ones contribute to the class projects and feels no urge to bestir herself. If she had set lessons and tests, I think she would do them. As it is, I can't see that she learns much. Babs is eight and she hardly reads at all.